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Ex-CIA agent says officials ignore, distort facts

By REBECCA OWSLEY

Responsibility for insuring a trustworthy CIA to perform necessary intelligence work rests ultimately with the American people and Congress. Former agent Frank Snapp told a Millett Hall audience Wednesday night.

Snapp, an eight-year veteran of the CIA, was for a number of years the agency's chief analyst and operative for the American embassy in Vietnam.

His book, "A Decent Interval," describing the final chaotic days in Saigon and events leading to the collapse of the city in 1975, was written after he resigned in protest when the agency refused his report on the evacuation.

SNEPP ACCUSED officials in Viet Nam of ignoring intelligence reports about the imminent fall of Saigon for personal or political reasons, and of failure to convey to Washington information vital to prepare for evacuation.

Throughout the period of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Snapp said, reports were manipulated to distort the facts of conditions there.

After the ceasefire in 1973, Snapp said the U.S. embassy "waged a massive publicity campaign to put on Saigon's best face and blemish the communists" so that Congress would not withdraw support.

No one would acknowledge that "all was lost," he said, in spite of accurate intelligence reports to the contrary nearly a month before Saigon fell.

The resulting confusion of the final days, said Snapp, meant many Vietnamese who had helped the U.S. did not get out of Viet Nam.

"Those in the most danger, who had served the CIA so many years, were left behind... because they made the mistake of trusting our false promises."

Snapp quoted CIA head, Adm. Stansfield Turner's evaluation of his book as, "a piece of history that is not particularly relevant."

"I disagree," Snapp said. "The betrayal of thousands must have relevance. The scruples learned in Vietnam are going to be with us a long time. We've got to know where we're headed... and be forewarned."

Although Snapp said nothing he wrote was classified information, the Justice Dept. has charged him with violating his CIA "secrecy oath."

A civil suit scheduled to begin in U.S.

District Court in Alexandria, Va. today, will ask for both an unspecified amount of money for "damages" suffered by the CIA and an injunction against further publications or lectures about Snapp's agency service.

Because of an additional charge that he broke a "fiduciary trust" — a presumed obligation of faithfulness to the government — in publishing his book, Snapp said he fears a judgment against him would establish a "dangerous precedent" threatening First Amendment rights.

If the concept of fiduciary obligation is upheld, he maintained, it could prevent any government worker, "from mailboy to highest official," from ever speaking out about government mistakes and wrongdoing.



CALLING THE GOVERNMENT'S suit against him "knee jerk hysteria," former CIA agent-turned author Frank Snapp spoke to a moderate sized Millett Hall audience Wednesday evening.